

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fish and Wildlife Service implemented the Land Acquisition Priority System in 1987 and revised the criteria in 1992. In 1993, the Committee on Scientific and Technical Criteria for Federal Acquisition of Lands for Conservation affirmed the need for criteria by stating “Each agency should develop individual criteria to rank its own acquisitions, because no single set of criteria will work to satisfy fully the different agency missions.” The criteria implement the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 which states the “the Mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitat within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

The purpose of the Land Acquisition Priority System is to: (1) document land acquisition needs and opportunities nationwide; (2) prioritize land acquisition projects submitted by the Regions; and (3) serve as a starting point for the annual land acquisition budget request. The criteria are one of the “tools” that we use to build our annual land acquisition priorities among the most important conservation projects in the Nation. The criteria for the Interim Land Acquisition Priority System consist of four components: Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Endangered and Threatened Species, Bird Conservation, and Ecosystem Conservation.

The Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Component addresses: (1) the status and trends of aquatic populations; (2) species diversity for trust resources; (3) critical habitats including watersheds and free-flowing rivers; (4) wetland types and trend status; and (5) wetland losses by percent of historic wetland base by state.

The Endangered and Threatened Species Component is: (1) recovery oriented; (2) considers habitat and biological community integrity as well as species occurrences; and (3) focuses on actual habitat use.

The Bird Conservation Component consists of: (1) regionally-developed lists of seventy species of concern for each region, as well as Hawaii and Puerto Rico; (2) a population importance index; and (3) an avian diversity index. Special emphasis is given to Nongame Species of Management Concern and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act Priority Waterfowl Species.

The Ecosystem Conservation Component addresses: (1) biodiversity through distribution and abundance of rare communities; (2) ecosystem decline and protection of native diversity of threatened ecosystems; (3) landscape conservation by preserving large, intact habitats through partnerships; and (4) contributions to national plans and designations.

These replace the criteria developed in 1987 and modified in 1992. The interim criteria will be used to set land acquisition priorities for projects funded under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Beginning with the FY 2002 budget cycle. A national team, made up of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists from all regions, developed these interim criteria and will continue to meet on an annual basis to make recommended and approved revisions to the criteria.

The Interim Land Acquisition Priority System criteria are available for comments. Send comments on or before June 30, 2000. Send requests for copies of this document and comments via mail or fax to: LAPS Team Leader, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Realty, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, 300 Westgate Center Drive, Hadley, MA 01035; Fax (413) 253-8480. You may email comments to: Andrew_French@fws.gov. Please submit Internet comments as an ASCII file avoiding the use of special characters and any form of encryption. Please also include: "Attn: LAPS Comments" and your name and return address in your Internet message.

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